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ART. IV. — *Geschichte der Französischen Literatur seit Ludwig XVI.* 1774. Von JULIAN SCHMIDT. 2 Bände. Zweite, vollständig umgearbeitete, Auflage. Leipzig: Fr. Wilh. Grunow. 1874.

IN choosing the year 1774 as the starting-point for his history of French literature, Mr. Schmidt has not been influenced by any wish to make his book include the arbitrary limits of a century; he has rather selected a date from which it is easiest to trace the growth of the diverse branches of modern, unclassical French literature. It was a period when the influence of the reign of Louis XIV. was to a considerable degree a thing of the past; although reminiscences of the classical drama still held the stage in the tragedies of Voltaire, already Diderot, Rousseau, and indeed Voltaire himself had undermined the artificial courtliness which made the charm of the Augustan age of French literature. Now, these philosophers were all old men; their work had been done, and France was awaiting the ripening of the seed they had sown, — which was the Revolution. Meanwhile, cynicism and immorality were rife; they found their literary expression notably in Chamfort, and Laclos's wonderful *Liaisons dangereuses*; in Bernardin de Saint Pierre, on the other hand, we find a warm love of nature and a religious yearning rare in the general corruption, but insufficient to check the dangerous current. Underneath the sentimentality and the complacent philosophy of the time the preparation for the overthrow of the monarchy was going on, and at last the storm broke. This and the subsequent course of literature this history describes.

How close is the connection between literature and history may be clearly seen in Mr. Schmidt's book. It is one of this author's principles in writing literary history, to avoid the biographical system which gives us a connected life of each man, without throwing sufficient light on his relations to his contemporaries. He says in his Preface: —

“Now it sounds like a paradox, but I hope the time will soon come when it will be considered necessary for every sort of history to be arranged in the same way as political history. In a history of the

Thirty Years' War, every one would find it absurd if it were told in a series of biographies, lives of Ferdinand, Wallenstein, Tilly, Gustavus Adolphus, etc. But that is nowadays the favorite method in literary histories.

"Literature, — that is to say, the appearance and dissemination of written or printed books, — letters, orations, dramatic performances, and whatever means are adopted for the expression of the intellectual life, the thoughts, the feelings, the imagination of a people, are all dependent for existence upon a number of preceding events, each of which is a part of the history of the time. Hence, to show their relation to one another, it is necessary to show how they followed one another."

In carrying out his design Mr. Schmidt has in fact very nearly written a history of France since the accession of Louis XVI. He has everywhere managed to keep the political part subordinate to what is purely literary; and yet, by writing about the history in its relation to literature, he throws new light upon both. The bond between the two is indeed an evident one, for who can miss seeing the connection between certain of Rousseau's writings, *Le Contrat Social*, for instance, and some of the ideas most prominent in the Revolution, and still smouldering in the minds of men? Beaumarchais's "Marriage of Figaro" expresses the dissatisfaction at the state of affairs which afterwards found other means of asserting itself; and the same is true in general. Fully to understand the classical period of French literature, it is necessary to be familiar with the pomp and majesty of the reign of Louis XIV; or, to take an example more familiar to us, in order to comprehend the tone of a great many of their writers during the last twenty years, it is well to know how the government lent its aid to the pleasure-loving extravagance which has fatally fascinated so many of us Americans.

There are possibly some who would at once rule out of court a foreigner who should undertake to write about French literature, and a German would be the first among foreigners to receive their condemnation. With even more zeal would they act in regard to a German who should have rewritten his book on French literature since the last great war. It should be said, however, that this book is not written for the French, but for a people which is more nearly akin to our own in its posi-

tion toward literature than is the French. And while truth is truth, without regard to geographical distinctions, it is still certain that every nation, by taste or precept, adopts certain principles of its own in regard to literature, which are as distinct as individual characteristics in living men. There is no real catholicity in literature, any more than there is absolute equality among human beings. The confusing lack of compactness of the Germans, their way of saying everything, offends the French ; what we call the decency of a great part of English literature seems to them to smack of prudery ; and it is only by an effort that we can understand many of the appearances of French literature. A foreigner who should write a literary history and content himself with denouncing everything he could not understand, would merely confirm his readers in their prejudices, when he should be giving them reasons for their opinions. He need not praise continually, but he should know why he thinks either one way or the other. If, on the other hand, he should trace the growth of what is strange in another literature, explaining its origin and detailing its history, even if he condemns the principle on which it rests, we are not tempted to give blind credence to his words ; we are able to judge for ourselves. And, in our opinion, this is what Mr. Schmidt has done. His point of view is more nearly that of his German and English readers, and yet he sets clearly before us the feelings which inspired the French writers. There will always be a difference of tone between the exposition of an analyst and that of a disciple, but it is well to hear both ; and it needs no voice from heaven to tell us which is most likely to make us think for ourselves.

While no history of French literature can wholly supersede that which Sainte-Beuve has written, in his detached *Causeries du Lundi* and *Nouveaux Lundis*, there may yet be much to learn from a foreigner who brings to the consideration of the subject, if not the same easy, gracious style and delicacy of observation, at any rate a commendable felicity of expression, and a standard of judgment which is different from that of the French critic, and possibly one made from the comparison of a greater number of examples ; it is at least a standard with which those of his readers are familiar who know our own lit-

erature and that of the Germans. Mr. Schmidt's merits are his coolness, which is not cynicism, great patience, which, at any rate in his French literature, does not become wearisome, and, as the result of both, the ability to form his opinion with due deliberation. If he lacks the swift, delicate touch of the great French critic, he is still by no means an unentertaining guide, and always a sure one, for nowhere does he let himself be carried away to forgetting to apply his usual test, the relation of what he is discussing to the world in which we live. This definition might evidently be used in defence of a very sordid style of criticism; we hope to show that in Schmidt's *History of French Literature* it has a very different meaning.

While perhaps it is the second volume, with its discussion of Balzac, George Sand, Alfred de Musset, Alexander Dumas, and Victor Hugo, etc., that is of the greater general interest to us who are more familiar with their writings than with those of their predecessors who are the subject of the first volume, it will be found nevertheless that the long chapters on Chateaubriand are of importance for understanding the growth of the Romantic school of France. This writer, with his various qualities, has a great deal of space devoted to him, as he deserves; Mr. Schmidt gives us very copious quotations from his different writings, letting us judge for ourselves the nature of man who so long imposed upon the French people, the man once worshipped by Sainte-Beuve, but afterwards the subject of some of his severest criticisms. If, as is claimed for him, he is to survive as the representative of the thoughts and feelings of this century, it is well for us not to be too confident of the favorable opinion of posterity. But even when Schmidt shows us Chateaubriand's colossal egotism, his frequent inaccuracy, his singular, it might even be called unprecedented, vainglorious boasting, he does justice to the masterly art of that great writer which blinded his contemporaries to his faults, and made him the mouthpiece of much of the disappointment and weariness of the world, which was the repentant awakening from a time of great indifference to anything but easy pleasure. Sainte-Beuve says, and doubtless with great truth, that it is impossible for a foreigner to get the full enjoyment of the beauty of his style; but no one at all conversant with the language can help

noticing, if only in a vague way, its richness and smoothness. In a time like the present, when there is but little patience with empty wailing, when science weeds many overgrown corners of the human mind, Chateaubriand's patchwork of second-hand learning, and his theatrical, self-conscious complaining, are just what can find the fewest defenders. At the time he wrote he expressed what was uppermost in the hearts of his fellow-countrymen, — the desire of glorifying their morbid discontent; this cannot be done without encouraging the growth of vanity, and they, delighted at finding those feelings put in sonorous language, which unadorned by Chateaubriand's genius would have sounded far less sublime, were very ready to forgive his errors. There is no art so grateful to us as that which throws a veil of romantic interest over our faults, but that veil becomes more transparent when the faults it covers are those of our grandfathers.

To what was remarkable in Chateaubriand, as we have said, Mr. Schmidt does justice, and he exposes his faults without rancor. The space he devotes to him is less in compass than that which Sainte-Beuve found necessary, who was continually returning to discuss his old love; but the impression made upon the two critics is to a very great extent the same. For a complete account of this writer, one cannot do better than turn to what Sainte-Beuve has said about him; but no one who takes up Mr. Schmidt's history should overlook his criticism, in his haste to get to those who are now more familiar writers.

Lamartine is treated of at some length. Mr. Schmidt says, speaking of the success of his *Méditations Poétiques* : —

“His personality had a great deal to do with this. He was a handsome young nobleman, of the highest social position, with the stamp of René; that is to say, extremely sceptical in his opinions, and very distrustful of the truth of his own heart, but inclined to throw himself into every new illusion, every new emotion, every new love, every new conviction, with youthful ardor; in short, an interesting, irresistible young man. . . . For information about him, we are unfortunately obliged to go to his later confessions. Of late years confessions of this sort have become epidemic among the celebrated men and women of France, and it is a source of great regret that they are always deeply tinged with vanity. No one of them

gives the unvarnished truth ; every one tries to idealize his life, and to wear a crown of glory ; hence the poet in his memoirs represents himself as much worse than in his earlier poems or than in his actual life."

He goes on to give us copious extracts from his writings, and then says : —

"What Lamartine offers us is not wholly new ; the thoughts and even the cadence remind us as much of Bernardin de St. Pierre's *Études de la Nature*, as poetry can remind us of prose ; there are, besides, traces of Rousseau's *Rêveries*, of *L'Homme de Désir*, and *Corinne*. But the charm lay in the form. The school of Horace and Boileau was completely abandoned ; the poetical expression corresponded to the actual sentiment. The verses, tinged with a tender melancholy, flowed melodiously ; a succession of agreeable pictures lent animation to the poetry, without giving it any definite form ; the rhythmical expression suited the dreaminess of the idea. To be sure, the emotions lacked depth, the ideas genuineness, the images freshness ; the reflections were superficial, the imagination had but little play."

In speaking of what should always be present to the mind of one who is criticising a foreign literature, Mr. Schmidt says : —

"When we undertake to compare our own judgment of one of its poets with that of a whole people, we should in the case of a lyrical poet be especially cautious, and should examine whether we do not lose the principal part of what delights his fellow-countrymen. In regard to an epic or dramatic work this is less likely to be the case ; an epic poem or a play, which, stripped of its external varnish in a literal translation, has not merit enough of its own to impress us as important, does not belong to the first rank. In lyric poetry, on the other hand, the form and the contents are really one ; even in the best translation one can never appreciate a lyric at its just value, and for a foreigner who understands the language, to enjoy the original in the same way as a native, it is necessary that there should be a certain relationship between the languages. There is that connection between the German and the English. I imagine that I can appreciate a poem of Lord Byron, Moore, or Burns as thoroughly as any Englishman or Scotchman, just as Englishmen who know our language can appreciate Goethe's poems. The case is different with the languages derived from the Latin. Any one, with an ear for

such forms, can comprehend clever turns or rhetorical flights; but what is truly poetical, that which works immediately, we are slower to enjoy. The Latin races set a very different value on the sound of words from what we do. For us the word is merely the representative of the meaning, the suggester of the image; the value of what is purely musical we must first interpret for ourselves. Hence, when a Frenchman denies the soundness of our judgment of Lamartine's poems, on the ground that there is something in them which we do not hear, and so cannot appreciate, we are obliged to confess the reasonableness of his objection.

"But we are not obliged on that account to refrain from all judgment of their lyric poetry. There is enough, besides the melody, which we can understand and judge, — the thoughts, the images, the genuineness of the sentiment; moreover, we can compare the different French poets with one another. We can compare the modern French Romanticism with its classical predecessors, we can compare the whole recent academic literature with the poets of the sixteenth century; and we can measure single poets of the school with one another. If these comparisons fail to give absolute value to our judgment, they at least bring us nearer the truth."

Starting with this principle, Mr. Schmidt says: —

"Lamartine had the immense advantage of being the first of his school. Chateaubriand had given himself up entirely to politics; the real Romantic authors had not yet appeared. When to-day we run over the *Méditations*, we can hardly realize the paradox which they seemed to contain at the time of their appearance. Religious sensibility, sensitiveness to nature, to moonlight, and the deep silence of night, a decided inclination to tearfulness, attention to the life of different natural objects, — an oak, the ocean, a swallow, — occasional longing after death, all that has become so hackneyed since then, that we read this without much excitement. But in the year 1820 it seemed paradoxical to Frenchmen, and when the ruling powers accepted the *Méditations* because their political and religious tendency might be of use to them, the younger generation was delighted with them for their novelty and the change from the incessant turmoil of war."

He compares him as a lyric poet with Goethe, and gives Lamartine by no means the high position that is claimed for him. He charges him with lacking "the free and natural heart-beat which moves us so strongly in every poem of the same sort

of Goethe's." He has "smooth, artificial sentences, which exclude all play of the fancy and all real dreaming." "The exaggeration as well as the effeminacy of Lamartine often repel us, but a certain nobility of soul reconciles us again, when we compare him with the other writers of love-songs of the period. When Beyle indulges in fancies about love, he seems very unattractive, and the case is almost worse with Béranger. . . . The *Méditations* celebrated a sort of love of which the French had previously had no representation, a love which was the medium for what eludes the grasp of the senses."

It is to be said, however, that our interest in Chateaubriand and Lamartine is principally of an historical kind; they are the classics of the Romantic school, and demand full treatment more from the position they have won in their own country than from the interest they now excite in foreigners. It is impossible to have a satisfactory impression of the French literature of the present century without knowing them, but with most of us outside barbarians they have risen to the dusty and well-filled shelves of the respected unread; our tastes lead us to the study of their successors, Victor Hugo, Balzac, George Sand.

Chateaubriand was one of the first to hail Victor Hugo, who led the literary revival of 1820–1830, which, it will be remembered, was so warmly greeted by Goethe, then a very old man, but still attentive to everything going on in the world of letters. Victor Hugo began his literary career as an ardent royalist, and to this enthusiasm he owed in great measure the recognition he won from Chateaubriand, the inventor of the René, whose fame was now to be made even greater by the younger writers. Mr. Schmidt explains the religious and political conservatism of the young Romanticists as follows. He says:—

"The Christian tinsel was a protest against the periwigs, the encyclopædia, and the mathematics. The imagination felt itself fettered in this mesh of abstractions, and the mind was confused in the whirl of contradictory ideas. It was a wonderful masquerade. The Bayaderes, made holy by remembering the goddess of Liberty, found their altar; and the ascetics their cells, which had been a refuge against

the storms of the Revolution. The comfortable *bourgeois* of the school of Voltaire, which limited its religion to the one commandment, — not to do wrong; the pale priest, who, crucifix in hand, had marched out against the wild bands of the *Chouans*; the gray-mustached veteran who had fought at the Pyramids and lost the use of his limbs on the ice-plains of Moscow, and who worshipped only one god, the god of war, and the eagle of his country; the despised Jacobin of the time of the convents, who strolled with his hand-organ from village to village, playing the *Marseillaise*; the curiosity-peddlers who drove bargains over mediæval saints' images, and explained the forgotten coats-of-arms; — all were confused together. What could seem fitter to an imaginative youth than the return to what had stood firm amid the general crash, to what seemed most unlike the detested, mathematico-economical state of society, namely, the splendor of the Catholic Church and the sanctity of anointed royalty? . . . Christianity had its long history, its striking colors, it stirred all the depths of the soul, and so was much better suited for artistic treatment than the pale, uninteresting view of the world of the 'Theophilanthropists,' who survived as a feeble reminiscence of the attack against Christianity of the eighteenth century. . . . Lyric poetry began with singing throne and altar, chivalry and Church; then it turned to elves and nixies, then to poets and unrecognized geniuses, and at last it sank to humanity, to which it promised a glorious future. The muse, who at first adorned her head with lilies, at last put on the red cap."

If Victor Hugo was fickle with regard to the subjects he chose, he has always remained firm in his manner of treatment; however his views may have changed, he has never lost confidence in himself; he has been sure of his own genius. Indeed, it would be hard to put one's finger on a French writer who has let himself be hampered by any desponding doubts as to the value of his work. Whatever their sensitiveness to external things, that quality never seems to extend very far beneath the surface. Their tears are very near their eyes, but within they are hard as stone. So much at least we should be inclined to say of Chateaubriand, Lamartine, and Victor Hugo. The novels of the last named have what is called an enormous success, but it is not easy to get any solid satisfaction from *Han d'Islande*, for example. In that novel the hero, a cannibal, the son of a witch and a monster, begins his career by burning

the monastery in which an attempt had been made to educate him. He swims from Iceland to Norway on the branch of a tree, and gives his attention to the serious business of life, undermining crowded bridges, burning up cathedrals, and, being jealous of some unknown soldier, with a wild justice he determines to eat up the whole regiment; and this is literature!

It would be natural, but wrong, to close with him here. The importance of his plays cannot be overlooked, still less the charm of some of his lyrics. Théophile Gautier, in his recently published *Histoire du Romantisme*, has left to us a charming account of his early enthusiasm for Victor Hugo's *Hernani*, which at its appearance in 1830 so divided the literary world. It is with real humor that he describes his boyish zeal. And it is by no means hard to see how the surprises of the play, the quick dialogue, and the breathless interest that is kept up, can fascinate those who are disposed to enjoy the melodrama. As melodrama no one can find fault with most of Victor Hugo's plays. If we will but confess, not only that they represent something different from every-day life, for so much can be said of every sort of dramatic literature which deserves the name, but also that they represent a sort of life in which our interest is given, not to the nature of the characters, but to the perils which surround them, and that we look upon the *dramatis personæ* as we do at rope-dancers; if we will confess so much, we can justify our interest in them, but we must be careful to discriminate between the intensity of interest and real sympathy. The latter is a *sine qua non* for literary success.

Mr. Schmidt treats of these plays at some length. After *Hernani* and *Marion de Lorme* he says:—

“A number of Renés followed these two: such as Rodolfo, Genaro Borgia, and Ruy Blas; they have all the same gloomy face, the same bitter twitching of the lips. Whoever is interested in such people would do better to go to the fountain-head, to René or the Giaour; Victor Hugo only gives us variations on the familiar theme, he has never invented a melody of his own.

“The second stock character we have already met in Ruy Gomez: the old baron of feudal times, the type of the Romantic catechism,—loyalty, independence, honor, hospitality, family pride, etc. In the middle of an orgie a folding-door opens, disclosing a tall old man

with a white beard, a huge sword, and, if possible, the Golden Fleece, or some equally lofty order, on his breast. For some time he gazes with imposing silence on the wild doings of the young courtiers, and then says with his deep voice, 'In my time it was far different.' Then he describes his time in a rather long speech, and disappears as solemnly as he entered. For example, the Burgrave Job, the old Marquis de Nangis at the court of Richelieu, Ruy Gomez with the wild companions of King Charles, St. Vallier among the gallants of Francis the First, Ormond among the debauched Cavaliers. Occasionally the abusive old gentleman, or Dottore, as he seems to us, gets himself up as a tyrant; but he still wears a wig. 'I am a terrible man. I can have the life of whomsoever I will, and I know no pity. I belong to the family of the Malipieri, each one of whom takes the life of him he hates. I hate my wife. Hence I shall have her put to death,' etc. Every time the good old man is deceived, for there is the same monotony in the situations as in the figures.

"The third stock character is the diplomatist of Scribe's school, the machinist. A cold, heartless creature, who holds the secret threads of the intrigue in his hands, and who turns the passions which destroy others to his own selfish interests. His appearance is in the rule as follows. The first lover is about to utter a monologue expressive of his disgust with the world, when some one taps him on the shoulder. He turns; a man stands behind him, wrapped in a dark mantle, with a pale, hard face, with eyes in which nothing can be read, and motionless features. He begins: 'You are so and so, you were born at such a time, in such a place.' Then he gives a full account of the hero's genealogy, tells him and the audience — for the scene is always in the first act — all the particulars of his life, and closes with, 'Now you wish so and so, I will secure it for you' (this is to get an entrance to the boudoir of some reigning duchess, to cut off the head of the prime-minister, to make his mistress a millionaire, a countess, or something of the sort). 'Are you willing?' 'Of course; but on what terms?' Then follows the answer, according to the mood of the machinist: 'A little key, a hundred thousand scudi, or your head.' To be all-knowing and all-powerful in this fashion, he has to be one of the secret police of Venice (Homodei), or a bandit with a position under Lucrezia Borgia (Gubetta), or a creature of Richelieu's (Laffemas), or very rich (the Jew in *Marie Tudor*, who only appears to give the history of Fabiani's life, and is then at once stabbed to death), or a very great diplomat (Simon Renard, Salluste), or a simple fool untouched by ordinary passions, and who hence sees what the dazzled hero overlooks (L'Angely).

"The last character is the Cavalier. The taste of the Ceto-Roman books of knight-errantry is unchanged. Ready at any moment to measure swords with a dozen giants or Philistines, or to throw himself in despair at the feet of a cold marquise, or, if long withstood, ready to fall in love with the first pretty face ; devoted to women with that sort of gallantry which is nine parts jest and one part love ; quick to anger, but prompt to forget it at the first joke ; a great many debts, and a long line of ancestors ; a peer before the monarch, and a good fellow at a drinking-bout, — such are the qualities of a nobleman as we see them drawn in Froissart, in Calderon, in the memoirs since the time of Louis XIV., and, more recently, in the garrison adventures of Alexander Dumas. . . .

"Victor Hugo sees his figures, not in any complete way, but in a definite theatrical situation ; they depend upon some stage-effect. Lucrezia Borgia has been turned into an opera with only trifling modifications, and almost every one of his tragedies is capable of such treatment. The soliloquies stand for arias, the dialogues for duets, and the machinist would take the main rôle."

Somewhat the same unfavorable criticism he applies to Victor Hugo's lyric poetry, in speaking of his *Orientales* ; he praises the grace, accuracy, and novelty of their form, but says : —

"The images, rhythm, and rhyme serve no poetic end, they are themselves an end ; the cadence swallows up thoughts and sentiment ; we admire the certainty with which the chords are struck, but we hear no melody. The drapery, the silks and satins, the landscape, the color, all bear the stamp of a master-hand, but we see no eyes from which a living soul looks forth."

This is not favorable criticism, and there is in the community a vague feeling, something like that which opposes capital punishment, that criticism to be sound has to be complimentary. It is true that Victor Hugo has won for himself a great name, and his prominence certainly demands for him very careful attention. Mr. Schmidt, however, shows that his qualities are those which are calculated to arouse keen interest, without giving any lofty pleasure. He has acquired fame ; but, in comparison with acknowledged masterpieces, do his writings deserve the highest praise, — praise, that is to say, to correspond with his temporary success ? That is the question before the

critic, and to which Mr. Schmidt gives an unfavorable answer, — unfavorable, that is, to Victor Hugo, but favorable to the interest of literature. Indeed, he goes even farther, and after charging the poet with representing paradox as of every-day occurrence, and with neglecting the study of life to please our ears and eyes with novel surprises, he says: “This incessant attention to new devices to give stronger coloring to the rôle he is playing, is the reason he has remained in his old age what he was as a youth, a frivolous adventurer in the fields of sentiment, thought, and poetry.”

Whatever his faults, Balzac was a man of a different stamp; he never fastened his reader's attention by ingenious tricks; he resorted to the study of human beings, and although he devoted himself principally to the study of disease in unworthy subjects, and often mistook distasteful inventions of his morbid fancy for genuine pathology, he has left behind him work of great power. The faults which are so prominent in his novels are not to be laid entirely to the account of the writer; the taste of the time had been corrupted by false ideals; the air was full of immoralities and provincialisms. Of the last named there is hardly one, unless it is the adoration of Paris rivalling the Mahomedan's feeling towards Mecca, which readers of French novels are more frequently reminded of, than this of which Mr. Schmidt speaks as follows: —

“A superstitious devotion to the nobility, or rather to the life of good society, to the *je ne sais quoi*, which distinguishes every inhabitant of the Faubourg Saint Germain from the rest of the world, is perhaps his weakest side. In spite of its democracy there exists in Paris an impassable barrier between the different classes of society; in spite of their sneers against the ideas of legitimacy, the literary adventurers are constrained in their attitude towards the aristocracy. . . . Balzac is by no means the only one who errs in this way; almost all the novelists of the time are running over with titles and coats of arms; the manners of the court, the impertinence and frivolity of the young ladies of fashion are put in a poetical light; the liberal-minded private citizen is either a knave or a fool. Pure blood is the principal thing insisted on for horses, dogs, and people; the next thing is elegant gloves. Under all this praise of the aristocracy the *parvenu* is easily detected in the love of luxury and contempt for honest work.”

Again : —

“ If Balzac fancied that he had thoroughly investigated human nature, his speciality was the analytical representation of French society at the time of the Restoration ; of that he considered himself the Buffon. He viewed with a keen and intelligent eye the kingdom of shadows, of feverish joys intermingled with cold calculation. . . . From the *Scènes de la vie Parisienne* there is a great deal to be learned, but it is a repulsive world into which Balzac introduces us. Vice and crime are the rule. Social life is a riddle the solution of which lies wholly in the bagnio ; its locks have to be picked. His favorite figures are young aristocrats, steeped in every refinement of pleasure, who have constructed for themselves a sort of perverted morality, and who commit crimes which, under other circumstances, would bring them to the galleys, not merely for the attainment of an object, but with a sort of dogmatic conviction, out of duty, as Beyle says ! ”

As our quotations show, Mr. Schmidt has but little mercy for the snobbishness of so many French novels, — that quality which imposes upon so many of their readers, — and he is equally clear-sighted with regard to Balzac's perverted moral sense, which is so patent and so painful, as well as for the psychological impossibilities of some of the novels. In general they may be said to be simply records of sinfulness ; even the most innocent are tainted by a foul flavor, as if the one or two single volumes of comparative innocence had been infected by those that stood on the same shelf which dealt with the blackest sides of human nature. The record against Balzac for this fault could be made as long as it would be odious. So wonderful, however, is his power of analyzing people, of setting them and their surroundings before us, of exposing their motives, of interesting us in their devious course, of making us share in their villainies, and almost sympathize with the most atrocious criminals, that we cannot help acknowledging his wonderful power, even if, on laying down one of his novels, we feel as if we had spent our life hitherto in picking pockets, robbing the dead, and burning churches. He gives his readers a great satiety of wickedness. One who has read many of his novels feels afterwards as if at that time of his life he had been one of a band of outlaws.

Mr. Schmidt does not content himself with exposing some

of the more obvious flaws in Balzac's work ; he discusses many of his novels in turn, and writes a great deal of sound and serious criticism about him. He does justice to his power, but he always speaks with coolness about his use of it. We regret we have not space for further quotations. We cannot do more than refer the reader to Vol. II. pp. 450 – 458, where there is to be found a careful examination of this French novelist. Scattered references may be found elsewhere. They show very well the critic's habit of mind, and his method of discussing authors. What is most especially to be noticed is his certainty of touch, so to speak. We feel that we have to do with a man who is never startled by sudden blushes of shame at foolish enthusiasms. He is not fascinated by external charms to forgetfulness of solidier merits ; he always remembers to put the questions, What is the real value of this ? In the first place, does it represent life ? and, secondly, does the representation serve to please, even with sadness, or to pain the reader ? The exciting of repulsion is to be avoided in literature as much as in painting. It is easy for readers to content themselves with getting any feeling except fatigue from a book, and certainly talent is required to arouse a sort of disgust which shall not be wearisome ; but it is as important to discriminate between that feeling and healthy enjoyment as it would be to avoid putting Boucicault above Shakespeare, because his plays are more applauded by theatre-going audiences. Mr. Schmidt never forgets to do this. It is a quality which makes a usually safe guide through the devious paths of modern French literature ; if he were one who contented himself with noisy abuse, he would overshoot his mark and only do himself and his readers harm ; but he always, or very nearly always, discriminates between what is deserving of blame and what of praise. He does not earn his name for impartiality by unexpected and surprising abuse ; he is very able to say a good word even for writers he dislikes, when they happen to deserve it. Most students of later French literature have to learn to adapt themselves to much which — owing, let us say, to provincial prejudice — is extremely painful. The application of just the same tests as they use for their own literature would lead to condemning the foreign one

in toto. Indeed, this is the course of a great many intelligent people; they will have nothing to do with it. Those, however, who go on in it wilfully harden themselves to a great deal, and the danger is that they lose the power, or rather let it lie inactive, of deciding where they shall draw the line between prudery and proper reserve. Some speak of these books as freely as if they were light clouds vanishing in the summer sky, instead of very possible agents of mischief with thoughtless persons. The evil tendency is ignored with the same good-nature with which one forgives occasional misprints. A companion and adviser like Mr. Schmidt does not denounce them all; he shows where their merits lie, and how much their faults are due to mistaken views of men and life; he supplies the necessary tonic; he remedies the indifference about mere matters of morality which is apt to grow upon readers fascinated by charms of style and character-drawing.

What underlies the whole of modern French fictitious literature is the feeling, but ill expressed by the phrase, "art for art's sake," that whatever exists in human beings is a proper subject for the pen. In how narrow a way this maxim is followed may be seen by the exclusiveness with which, almost without exception, the odious sides of human nature are chosen for description and discussion. Everything must have the flavor of forbidden fruit, and this it is which makes the narrowness and provincialism of French literature as truly marked and more frequent than even the pastoral simplicity of the ideal English novel at which Frenchmen are forever laughing. Even those who are bold enough to deny that its influence is injurious, must confess that it is one-sided in what it represents; no external cleverness should make us forget this fundamental fault.

Perhaps the readers of Mr. Schmidt's History would object more to his treatment of Alfred de Musset than to any other part of his book. When we recall Taine's comparison between him and Tennyson, and the praise given him by the French critic, we are able to see why it is he is so popular with his fellow-countrymen. He had when he began the charm of youth, grace, and elegance of form. He has sung what he chose to sing with an easy airiness which could not fail to

please. Then, too, the story of his life, his early age when he began to write his best poetry, his melancholy struggle after false ideals, and his abject failure which he tells in sad lines, all combine to make us pity the man and set great store by what was good in his work, because it was so very good. It had the stamp of genuineness, in spite of the occasional sham Spanish and Italian setting. With all his tropes and straining of voice, Victor Hugo never could hide the hardness within. But with all his faults, Alfred de Musset was a poet, even if a mistaken and deluded man; in his youth his freshness fascinated his readers, — it was with great joyousness he entered life, — and during his struggle with the world and its snares, he followed what was the ideal of his race and generation. No one ever sang so sweetly the apples of Sodom, and when they turned to dust in his mouth, his pathos half hides his cynicism. Very touching are the much-quoted lines he wrote while still a young man, which, even if familiar to our readers, will bear rereading: —

“ J’ai perdu ma force et ma vie,
 Et mes amis et ma gaité;
 J’ai perdu jusqu’à la fierté
 Qui faisait croire à mon génie.
 “ Quand j’ai connu la vérité,
 J’ai cru que c’était une amie;
 Quand je l’ai comprise et sentie,
 J’en étais déjà dégoûté.
 Et pourtant elle est immortelle,
 Et ceux qui se sont passés d’elle
 Ici-bas ont tout ignoré.
 Dieu parle, il faut qu’on lui réponde.
 — Le seul bien qui me reste au monde
 Est d’avoir quelquefois pleuré.”

These lines should be read in the light of his other writings; they have a very different sound from much that he wrote. Mr. Schmidt, however, is not led by the beauty of his verse to overlook the many faults of the poet. He says, and with truth, of Alfred de Musset’s earliest work, that while the conflict between passion, which is the most concentrated expression of an individual nature, and law, which represents the interests of the community, may lead to a tragic catastrophe,

this poet celebrates not passion, but crime. For this statement he brings copious examples. Such writing, he says, can only be, not justified, but explained, by its being a mirror of real life.

"In general," he goes on, "one is inclined to ascribe whatever is great and fine in an author to his nature, and whatever is bad to the influences of his time. Our time, however, is not an abstract idea, but it expresses the sum of our principles, habits, inclinations, wishes, and ideals, which, according as they are sound or corrupt, open a hopeful or a despairing view of the future."

He denies that the poet in these odious scenes properly describes the actual life of his day, and says they did not spring from the air, but that they arose from a struggle after what should rack the feelings and be true to nature. Hence the continual struggle after impressiveness which so often offends good taste. With the beauty of his poetry one often forgets, he says, the distastefulness of the subject; it is with breathless interest one reads some of his prose plays and novels. He quotes for especial commendation *Les Caprices de Marianne*, and we decidedly approve of his choice. Those who have been so fortunate as to have seen this play acted will certainly never forget it. Of his stories Mr. Schmidt says:—

"In his choice of subjects Alfred de Musset reminds one often of Mérimée, who had a great influence over him; to make the distinction clear one should read the novel of Mérimée's, *La double Méprise*, which had just appeared; it is a story of adultery of the most repulsive sort with regard to the subject, but treated so delicately, that although it cannot be called decent, for everything is expressed, it may be said to be moral. It shows the way in which in Parisian society a noble nature conducts itself after committing a grievous fault. . . . The difference between the two is this: Mérimée remains master of himself when describing wild scenes, Alfred de Musset loses his head and becomes wild himself."

In his criticisms of these stories of Alfred de Musset, as well as of many other pieces of French literature, Mr. Schmidt often does no more than tell the story in the simplest manner, stripping it of the smooth form which so often benumbs the reader's critical sense, but showing us what is the real value of

what might have had a good chance of winning our admiration. He remembers, too, that it is one of the first duties of a critic to illustrate and prove what he has to say, as well as to make interesting statements. We can see his mood, either of admiration or of contempt, in the way in which he makes the abstract, and often again he lets that suffice ; he shows us the fundamental weakness, and then passes on to something else. An excellent example of this is his treatment of Lamartine's incredible *La chute d'un ange*, Vol. II. pp. 511-13.

From the examples we have given, the reader may be able to form a tolerably definite notion of some of Mr. Schmidt's merits as a critic. It will be seen that it is not with a thoroughly sympathizing spirit that he writes about French literature ; that he rather tends to depreciate the value of form in a work, in comparison with qualities more easily defined, and possibly of greater importance. His position, however, is not one of hostility, although very often one of disapproval ; there is no unwillingness to admire to be detected in what he says, indeed he is often no severer than the smoothest tongued French critics. He sees, what they see, that before the Revolution of 1830 there was a revival in French literature which promised more than has subsequently been performed. The young generation produced work which was surprisingly good, when one considers the age of the writers ; in Mérimée's case no one would have suspected him of being hardly more than a boy, and that was perhaps true of some of the others. Victor Hugo, the leader, was but twenty-eight years old, and there is no cause for wonder that Goethe watched the efforts of these youths with the greatest interest. But what has come of it all ? Victor Hugo is still before the public, claiming that he is the great genius of the day, and writing such novels as his last, *Quatre-vingt-treize*, which saddens the hearts of men. Gautier, who died a year or two ago, has left interesting work behind him. The little that Mérimée did will always find admirers, although it is highly probable that the *Lettres à une Inconnue* are what he will be best remembered by. The movement as a whole failed, and Mr. Schmidt naturally is anxious to find out the grounds of this failure. Foreigners who treat of French literature are very often extremely ten-

der in what they say about it; it seems to be a matter of personal pride not to be too harsh with it. An appreciation of its merits is often taken to be something like speaking their language with a good accent,—a mark of high culture. It involves a lofty sense of morality, so lofty indeed that ordinary distinctions are of no account; the intrigues of the vicious are looked at as coldly as we look at gold-fish swimming about in a globe; we have to watch a villain plotting and carrying out his crimes with the same approval with which we follow an heroic struggle, if not with complete indifference. Sometimes we hear that the grandmotherly feeling of propriety which we mistake for morality is treated with all the respect it deserves, when, at the conclusion of the book, some harsh fate seizes the leading villain. But if the whole story has been inculcating wrong-doing as something desirable in itself, though occasionally liable to bring the guilty one to harm, no shocking catastrophe at the end can undo the mischievous effect, any more than a death on the scaffold can beautify the past life of a criminal.

A noticeable book of this sort is Gustave Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*, which is often brought forward as the one odious book with a salutary lesson in it. Taine thus speaks of it in his *Vie et Opinions de M. Grain d'Orge*, and many other writers re-echo his verdict. Those who are led thereby to read it, however, find it hard to have due patience with its disagreeable, unflinching delineation of an offensive subject. We find, to be sure, that sin brings its punishment, and on that account a pardon is sought for the book; but morality is not a matter of the last chapter, it depends upon the whole construction of the book, the delineation of the characters, the way they are connected with one another, etc. If the part of wickedness wins our applause or sympathy in the body of the book, the last twenty pages, no matter how tragic, will not be able to undo the evil that has been done; if we have been sneering at virtue for two volumes and a half, our tardy respect at the end cannot count for much.

It is claimed that the writer is justified in ignoring no side of human nature; that he has the same duty to investigate impartially as the man of science; this may be true, but he

should also exercise the same reserve. When scientific men have to do with matters which are tabooed by the unanimous consent of society, they are careful not to thrust them forward out of their proper place. We do not have a description of the processes of digestion printed on our bills of fare. But of French novelists, the man who can invent something new in the time-worn subjects of crime at once makes his mark. This is not as it should be; let him study any subject he pleases, but let him not smuggle the report of his investigations into every careless hand, corrupting under the pretence of amusing.

It is also said that we should be satisfied with the admirable way in which the work is so often done, that the merit of the workmanship makes up for the worthlessness of the subject. But no ability of an author to describe, can make us indifferent to the subject of the description. Beauty and accuracy of color cannot hide a picture, and so it is with books. The authors pretend to write on all sorts of subjects with impartiality; to describe for the sake of describing, as if emotion were a quality which could be ignored at will, as if it were not a great part of every work of art, which could not be left out without belittling the whole work. The artist who undertakes to work without it is mutilated just so far as he comes near succeeding, and no skill in his craft can make up for its absence. This beauty of form, of which we hear so much, means, it is fair to suppose, this technical skill. But of what use is the manipulation of the brush, if we cannot get any pictures; or the beauty of form in writing, if it is devoted to offending us? This quality which is here denounced is the one most frequently brought up in defence against harsh criticism of modern French literature; but so long as readers are fair representatives of the human race, and as such still care for the principles, feelings, and duties that make up human life, there must be some discontent at the shadowy appreciation of books which looks no further than at the outside.

That in which the French do excel us outsiders is a quality which certainly stands for a great deal; it is the gift of easy, delicate expression. They flatter their readers by a graciousness which we all naturally prefer to any amount of honest bluntness. Sinful man would always rather hear a compli-

ment he knew to be false, than be told painful truths without tact; and it is tact which so many French writers have. They know how to please; they leave things unsaid; they impose upon us by their neat epigram, just as a man who is well dressed shines above the man who has to hide a tear in his coat by keeping his arm always in one position. For the time there is a great difference between them. It is a ridiculously trifling matter, and one who is not self-conscious does not know it, but others feel it. The French writers are fully conscious of this, and hence there arises probably that contempt for rugged virtues which is to be observed in other nations than France, that pride themselves more on intellectual cleverness than humdrum morality, as if the one were something old-fashioned and exploded, and the other the fruit of a higher civilization. Not that we would charge the French with never recognizing nor using the truth, but it may be said that their most attractive quality is one that exercises a much greater influence than it should, and this it does both upon them and upon us. How demoralizing this is and may be we all know; and in the way of instruction about this, as we have said, Mr. Schmidt's book can be of great service. We can hardly say, however, that it gives enough credit to the quality of French literature we have just alluded to, which, while used unworthily, may be the cloak for great faults, it is true, but also is of great service when used in other ways. It is an advantage like a good voice to an orator, or a fine instrument for a musician. There is nothing, however well worth saying, but is the better for being well said. This grace is as good a weapon in righteous hands as it is dangerous when used by those who defend the wrong. To take a most noticeable instance of how valuable it can be, there is Sainte-Beuve, who, with all his politeness, often made himself felt painfully. It is in general a quality which needs no pointing out; it strikes at once and fascinates for a time every reader of French, and it is against its dangers that Mr. Schmidt is most eloquent; we cannot help thinking, however, that he might also have indicated its merits more clearly.

Mr. Schmidt's History only comes down as far as the beginning of the Second Empire; and hence much of the later

degradation does not fairly come within its compass. He has treated some recent authors in detached papers with a great deal of ability. His History, however, gives a complete account of what has been done by authors of every sort from the time immediately following that of the great writers of the last century to almost the last manifestations of literature in France. The brief extracts we have given indicate very insufficiently the thoroughness with which he has performed this severe task. All praise is due, also, to his impartiality. We can warmly recommend the book to all readers of German.

T. S. PERRY.

ART. V. — THE CURRENCY DEBATE OF 1873-74.

IN his speech at the bar of the House of Lords on the impeachment of Warren Hastings, Sheridan, to the great delight of the historian who was himself among the audience, took occasion to refer to the "luminous page of Gibbon." The adjective was certainly not inappropriate; but when the brilliant orator was shortly after called to account for using it, the temptation proved too great for the wit, and he is said to have defended himself by insisting that he did not say "luminous," but "voluminous." The page of Gibbon is undeniably voluminous, but in it at least are garnered up the ripe fruits of twenty years of constant thought and conscientious labor spent in recounting the story of human civilization through fifteen eventful centuries.

During the autumn of 1873 the United States was visited by one of those financial storms, incident to the modern high-pressure system of conducting business, and which are common to all civilized countries and to every monetary system. Shortly after the fury of the tempest had subsided the national Congress met, and took the subject into consideration. Through nearly five mortal months the process of incubation was protracted, finally resulting in a measure which in due time was reproduced by the press of foreign lands as a legislative curi-